

## לְכָה דוּדִי

לְכָה דוּדִי לְקִרְאֵת כְּלָה, פְּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָה.

שְׁמוֹר וְזָכוֹר בְּדַבּוּר אֶחָד

הַשְּׁמִיעֵנוּ אֶל הַמִּיחָד.

יְהוּה אֶחָד וְשִׁמוֹ אֶחָד.

לְשֵׁם וּלְתַפְאֵרֶת וּלְתִהְלָה.

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לְקִרְאֵת שַׁבַּת לָבוֹ וְנִלְכָה

כִּי הִיא מְקוֹר הַבְּרָכָה.

מִרְאֵשׁ מְקֻדָּם נְסוּכָה

סוּף מַעֲשֵׂה בְּמַחְשָׁבָה תִּחְלָה.

לְכָה דוּדִי לְקִרְאֵת כְּלָה, פְּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָה.

מִקְדָּשׁ מְלֶךְ עִיר מְלוּכָה,

קוּמִי צְאִי מִתּוֹךְ הַהִפְכָּה.

רַב לָךְ שַׁבַּת בְּעֵמֶק הַבְּכָא,

וְהוּא יִחְמוֹל עָלֶיךָ חֲמֵלָה.

לְכָה דוּדִי לְקִרְאֵת כְּלָה, פְּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָה.

*continued*

which was the start of the Friday evening service in many rites, before the introduction of Kabbalat Shabbat.

**COME, MY BELOVED** לְכָה דוּדִי. The “beloved” who is invited here may refer to the soul, to others within the community of Israel, or to an aspect of the Divine. The first half of this refrain contains fifteen letters and the second half contains eleven, which are respectively the numerical equivalents of *yod-hei* and *vav-hei*, spelling out the name of God.

**“OBSERVE” AND “REMEMBER”** שְׁמוֹר וְזָכוֹר. The Decalogue appears twice in the Torah, with minor differences of wording. In Exodus (20:8), the fourth commandment opens with the verb *zakhor*, “remember” the Sabbath day; the Deuteronomy (5:12) version begins *shamor*, “observe” the Sabbath day. Harmonizing them, a midrash states that God uttered both words at once (Mekhilta, *Bahodesh* 7). Evoking that midrash here, the poet thus alludes to the unity established by Shabbat; for God, thought and action are one. And on Shabbat we, too, may feel as if who we are and how we behave are more unified.

**LET US GO OUT TO GREET SHABBAT** לְקִרְאֵת שַׁבַּת לָבוֹ וְנִלְכָה. This verse alludes to the practice of leaving the synagogue and going out into the fields to welcome Shabbat, the custom followed by the mystics of Safed, based on their interpretation of the Babylonian Talmud (Shabbat 119a).

**SHRINE OF OUR SOVEREIGN** מִקְדָּשׁ מְלֶךְ. This verse and the next five all build on the theme of Israel’s exile and her promised redemption. Shabbat is seen as a manifestation of the Shekhinah (God’s presence in the world), which is in exile with Israel. At the same time, Shabbat is also a foretaste of the redemptive time.

L’KHA DODI became a favorite Friday night hymn almost as soon as it was written. Its author, Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz (d. 1576), was a participant in the mystic circle in Safed, associated with the great master, Moses Cordovero. The poem is one of many written by Safed poets in which Shabbat, God, and Israel are intertwined and related through love. The depiction of Shabbat as bride and as queen has a long history of talmudic origin. The stanzas form an acrostic spelling out the author’s name, Shlomo Halevi.

L’kha Dodi juxtaposes two simultaneous movements: reaching toward the Divine and the Divine reaching toward the human. Thus, we are invited to go and greet Shabbat as she comes to us. The mystics added that this drawing close was not only between God and the human, but described an inner process of Divinity.

The poem serves as an introduction to Psalm 92, “The Song of the Day of Shabbat,”

וְהָיוּ לְמִשְׁפָּה שְׂאִסְיָךְ  
וְרָחֲקוּ כָּל־מִבְלָעֶיךָ.  
יִשִּׁישׁ עָלֶיךָ אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
בְּמִשׁוֹשׁ חֲתָן עַל כְּלָה.

לְכֵה דוֹדֵי לְקִרְאֵת כְּלָה, פְּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָה.

יָמִין וּשְׂמֹאל תִּפְרָצִי  
וְאֶת־יְהוָה תַּעֲרִיצִי,  
עַל יַד אִישׁ בֶּן־פְּרָצִי,  
וְנִשְׁמָחָה וְנִגְיָלָה.

לְכֵה דוֹדֵי לְקִרְאֵת כְּלָה, פְּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָה.

*We rise and turn toward the entrance.*

בּוֹאֵי בְּשָׁלוֹם עֹטְרֵת בַּעֲלָה,

גַּם בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבִצְהָלָה,

תּוֹרַף אֲמוּנֵי עַם סִגְלָה,

בּוֹאֵי כְּלָה, בּוֹאֵי כְּלָה.

לְכֵה דוֹדֵי לְקִרְאֵת כְּלָה, פְּנֵי שַׁבַּת נִקְבְּלָה.

YOU WILL SPREAD OUT  
תִּפְרָצִי. The subject here  
is ambiguous: “you” can  
simultaneously refer both  
to the Shekhinah and to  
the people Israel.

SCION OF PERETZ’S LINE  
אִישׁ בֶּן־פְּרָצִי. At the end of  
the Book of Ruth, David’s  
genealogy is traced back to  
Peretz, one of Judah’s sons.  
The verb *p-r-tz* (which also  
appears in the word *tifrotzi*,  
“spread out,” in the first  
line of this stanza) means  
“to break through,” and the  
use of this name, “son of  
Peretz,” for the Messiah has  
a dual meaning here. The  
human “fall” from the Gar-  
den of Eden came about by  
breaking God’s command,  
and the redemption will  
come by breaking through  
the world of sin.

FACING THE ENTRANCE.

Shabbat has been personi-  
fied throughout this poem.  
At this point, it is as if that  
personification, the bridal

queen, enters the synagogue. The con-  
gregation turns toward the entrance and  
bows to greet her. Then, as she moves to  
the forefront of the synagogue and takes  
her place on the *bimah*, the congregation  
turns toward the front and bows as she is  
enthroned next to the ark. Shabbat has ar-  
rived and the service proceeds with Psalm  
92, “The Song of the Day of Shabbat.”